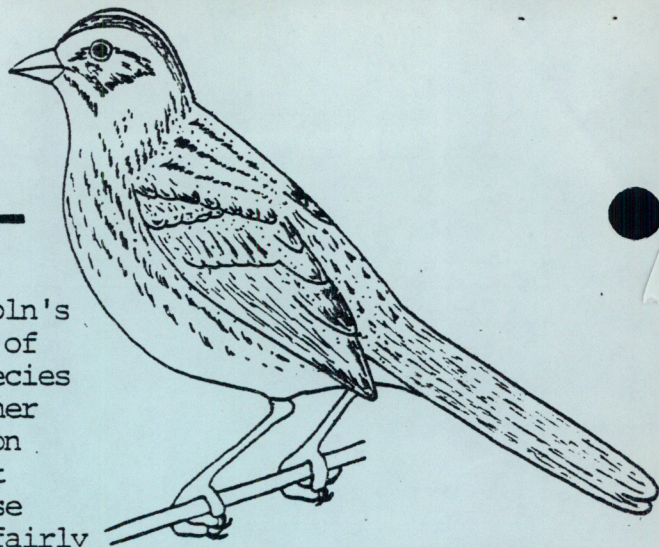


LINCOLN'S SPARROWS AREN'T ALL SHY

by John Wright, Head of Montague

For three or four years I have heard Lincoln's every spring, in a swampy unused field in Head of Montague. Peterson's field guide says this species is a "skulker, afraid of its shadow". Some other references emphasize their shyness. The Audubon guide, western region, qualifies it: "When not singing, it is wary and secretive." Maybe those near my home are western strays. I find them fairly bold when singing, and I have seldom got as close to a bird as I did this morning, May 29.



It was sunny, very light breeze, about 8°C. I heard one and began to approach it about 6:15 am. He perched high in a bush about 2.5 m tall, with open space around it. The song, to my ear, is: "teen'l, teen'l"; then about one second of a fairly high trill or gurgle; then a few shorter bits, often three (lower, higher, lower). Sometimes it is preceded by a lower, fainter "toon'l, toon'l".

In moving toward him, I had the feeling that, if I moved only during the utterance of a song, his attention would be more on his song than on me, and that he would have the urge to complete the song rather than break it off to flush.

As I moved about, in the full open and in a bright red coat, raising book and binoculars at times, he continued singing. He stayed high in the bush, changing twigs occasionally and even turning his back a while as if he didn't care if I was only 4 meters behind him. When I was only about 2.5 m away, he moved to the far side of the bush, hiding about 5% of himself behind a twig. I walked around the bush and he moved back to the other side.

I was too close to focus my binoculars. Looking from book to bird, I noted these field marks: narrow crown stripe, gray superciliary, buffy malar, white throat, buffy breast with streaks and a fairly distinct central spot. There was also a faint eye ring, but doesn't every sparrow have a trace of eye ring? His tail looked as if it had only two feathers. Maybe he lately had a narrow escape, but then why was he so bold? I got cold feet (literally) and "retired from the field". I hope he was proud of having sung me to defeat.

MARITIMES SHOREBIRD SURVEYS. 1983 marks the tenth anniversary of the Maritimes Shorebird Survey and the International Shorebird Survey schemes. During this time a wealth of information has been collected, much of it by volunteers. Data is proving invaluable for conservation purposes; including the identification of stopover areas, determination of migration routes and schedules, and a baseline against which future population trends may be measured. Initially surveys were carried out only during fall migration but since 1981 spring surveys have been conducted too. Participants in the scheme choose a survey area habituated by migrating shorebirds. Visits are made at intervals of one or two weeks, and information on species, numbers, behaviour, feeding and roosting sites, tidal conditions, etc. are recorded. In the past few years P.E.I. has had a very low participation level in this very worthwhile project. If you are able and willing to conduct counts this summer and fall, please contact Dr. R.I.G. Morrison, Canadian Wildlife Service, 1725 Woodward Dr., Ottawa, Ontario K1A 0E7.

